

## JIM MURRAY

# He's One of a Kind

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If, in your travels about the world, you run into a 50-year-old man in a cowboy hat named Thomas Austin Preston Jr. and he offers to bet you \$1,000 he can beat a thoroughbred racehorse in a 100-yard dash, don't reach for your wallet.

His 100 yards is "50 yards out thataway and 50 yards back." By the time that horse gets turned around, he's already back and collecting your money.

If you're a basketball player and he offers to beat you at free throws, even if you're Rick Barry, don't take it. He gets his choice of balls, and he'll choose a football. He's an expert from the free throw line with a football. Rick Barry is not.

If T. A. Preston offers to bet you he can throw a quarter into a potato from 20 feet and make it stick in 10 throws, pass. It'll be a mashed potato, and he'll make it stick on the third or fourth try. If you think he can't hit a golf ball a mile, you lose. He can from the short hill over the frozen lake he'll select.

If T. A. Preston ever says, "I'll play these," fold.

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Would it help you to know T. A. Preston is better known wherever they cut cards as Amarillo Slim? Not that there would be any doubt about it once you got a look at him. First of all, there's that 10-gallon hat. Then there's the white boots with "Slim" stitched into them. Then there's that figure, as lean as a branding iron, soaring 6-3½ into the air, 170 pounds, the long spidery fingers of the born dealer, the \$20 gold pieces strung by gold chains around his neck so the boys will know he can die standing pat. He talks in that soft, good ol' boy drawl of the West Texas plains, and he looks at you as if he's trying to decide if you're the type who could be run out of the game with two pair. Most people are, Slim finds.

"Most people are looking to lose," he drawls. "You get on a plane going to Vegas and you ask your seat partner what he's going to do at the tables and he says, 'Well, I ain't goin' to lose but about \$2,500. That's my limit.' I say, 'Podner, why wouldn't you be looking to run a toothpick up into a lumber yard?' You see, that's the trouble with most people. They won't stand to win. They get a couple of thousand ahead and they get nervous. They say, 'Well, I got to go out to dinner,' or 'I told my wife I'd be home to put out the cat.'"

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Even some champions are too skittish. Slim played the British Nick the Greek once in the Colony Club in London and ran the fellow out of so many pots, his backers called time and chided him, "This guy has won over half your money and you ain't seen his hand yet!" So the guy who didn't call when he should have, began to call when he shouldn't.

Amarillo Slim doesn't play cards, he plays people. Amarillo says he's not the world's greatest poker player, he's the world's greatest people player. I wouldn't pay a guy a nickel to stand behind your hand all night and tell me what you get. Because you'll be telling me yourself by the way you look, the way you play your hand. Two bets and a raise and I'll tell you every card you're holding. You gotta know people."

Amarillo Slim, whose Super Bowl of Poker, an all-comers' event at the Sahara Reno Hotel Jan. 24 to Feb. 7 with buy-ins of from \$200 (for the ladies' seven-card stud) to \$10,000 (for the no-limit "hold 'em" tournament), has to watch out for the sting himself.

Once, in Phoenix for a golf tournament, the legendary Alvin

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# MURRAY'S COLUMN

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(Titanic) Thompson bet Slim he couldn't hit 23 out of 25 skeets. Slim, who could hit 25 out of 25, surprised himself by losing by one bird. He hit only 22 of the 25. That night, he couldn't sleep and he tossed in his bed until he got dressed, went back out to the gun club. There, he kicked skeets till he found three of them were made of aluminum. He couldn't have broken them with a cannon.

Another time, a strong-arm crew overpowered him in the Sheraton-Universal Hotel, stripped him and robbed him, and trussed him in the bathtub. When the police came, Slim says, "There I was, all wired up and buck necked in the tub and they say, 'Well, do you want to report a robbery, Slim?' And I says, 'Well, sirs, if I ever see one, I'll sure report it.'"

People have little understanding of poker, says Slim. Even though it violates the rule of never wising up a sucker, he says his rules on poker are, in general:

1. Don't be afraid to win. Don't start looking to cut your losses, trying to quit when you're ahead, overbetting when you get good cards and giving up on mediocre ones. More people throw away winning hands than losing ones.

2. Don't expect a rose garden. Slim says to remember the price is against (7-5) getting a pair in any five-card draw. He points out he has won as much as \$40,000 on a hand which consisted of ace-6 and not much more. Conversely, a royal flush is not much good unless two other people get lesser ones in the same hand—a decided unlikelihood.

Slim says in all his years of playing he has had only four royal flushes. He scoffs at the movie scene of a guy winning a stud hand with a royal flush over four of a kind. "No gambler would keep drawing cards and paying for them while looking at three of a kind. The odds against them would be millions to one."

3. Never trust luck. Poker is a game of skill, not luck. Use your head, not your cards. If you get aces and fours, for example, throw away the fours and try to improve the aces, because, if the other guy can beat aces, he can usually beat aces and fours as easily. Draw to an inside straight if the pot is high enough. For instance, if the pot is like 20-1 for your bet, your chance of filling is 9-1, and Slim likes those odds. Bet.

4. Never bet a dead horse. Remember, poker is the one game you don't have to play the cards dealt you. You can always throw in. In gin rummy, you're married to your hand. In poker, you can divorce it if it's no good.

5. Bluff. And don't blink. Amarillo did this in a rest room in the basement of a New York restaurant once when he was cornered by two muggers. It looked as if he was bucking aces full with a pair of treys, but Amarillo put his hand menacingly in his coat pocket and pointed it at the pair. "The guy at the door I'm not so sure of," he drawled. "But you (and here he pointed at the nearest one) are going home in a paper bag." The muggers fled.

It was just one more time Slim got a guy to fold a pat hand to a busted straight and he didn't even have to show his cards. Which was good. Because what Slim was clutching in his pocket was a roll of 18 \$1,000 bills.